

Conference Paper

Exploring the Challenges of the Non-Directive Attitude in Person-Centred Counselling in Indonesian Culture

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Abstract

Indonesian culture has influenced the way people perceive counselling, which shows the tendency towards avoidance attitudes. The situation presents a challenge towards the feasibility of person-centred counselling to be applied in Indonesia, as the counselling approach tends to come across with Indonesian culture. This paper aims to critically discuss the potential challenges of working with the Indonesian client from a cultural point of view and the readiness of a counsellor in terms of knowledge about non-directive counselling by reviewing some literature in depth. The exploration of the challenges shows that the biggest obstacle to applying the non-directive attitude in Indonesia is the factor of the difficulty to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the non-directive concept rather than the factor of cultural difference. However, this challenge can be handled by understanding the concept of principled and instrumental non-directiveness which gives a view of flexibility and the broaden meaning of the non-directive attitude. Conclusively, there are no exclusions, limitations or boundaries from the person-centred approach that can convince the impossibility of becoming a non-directive counsellor in the Indonesian culture. The presence of inevitable challenges arising from the culture of Indonesia will not significantly affect the counsellor, if the non-directive attitudes have become part of the counsellor's self-concept.

Keywords: challenges; non-directive; person-centred counselling; Indonesian culture

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1. Introduction

In Indonesia, the term of counselling is used in the two different fields: education and mental health services. However, the term is more widely known in the education system, as a service for students with psychological problems, mainly because the government requires that every school have a school counselling service [1]. As a result, students, parents, and school staff members are more familiar with counselling in education. On the other hand, there are only some people who have a clear understanding of counselling in mental health services, which is used not only in supporting clients



in psychological distress but also in promoting personal growth. Others tend to see counselling unilaterally as aimed only at people with mental health problems or mental disorders. This phenomenon cannot be separated from cultural influences as it is stated by Setiawan [2] that socio-cultural factors in Indonesia have a huge impact on individual attitudes.

Based on Hofstede's [3] research, there are three cultural dimensions that explain the tendency of the individual's attitude towards counselling in Indonesia. The first dimension is collectivism which relates to conformity, loyalty, and the cohesiveness of a social group. This dimension shows that an individual's attitude towards counselling will be determined primarily by cultural conventions, which tend to discourage a positive perception of counselling. This is mainly because the culture has taught people about the importance of family, friends, and social community as the main systems for support with any problem [4]. Furthermore, culture has been integrated within education and embodied in compulsory subjects such as character education as well as moral and civic education. As a consequence, when people encounter psychological problems, they are not interested in counselling services because they already have some psychological supporters that are the relatives and people around them. Even though it might be useful for people to develop social and moral values, it gives an inverse impact on the level of willingness to seek counselling, which tends to be low [2].

The second dimension is the avoidance of uncertainty which is associated with a level of discomfort being in unknown or unpredictable situations [3]. This dimension has become part of Indonesian culture, for instance, in the trend of job preferences in Indonesia dominated by permanent employment with security assurances such as civil servants. In 2017, around 2.43 million people applied for civil servant vacancies, as reported by Merdeka Online News [5]. This trend has been transformed into a vibrant lifestyle or a culture where it is influenced by several factors such as economic condition and education. As a developing country, Indonesia still struggles with economic challenges, such as poverty and unemployment, as well the quality of education which remains a critical concern because most unemployed are from high school graduates [6]. Ultimately, those factors then mix and form a culture which leads to less positive views towards counselling. People tend to avoid counselling as it is less financially profitable. However, those who do go to counselling will focus on finding definite answers to their problems by asking some directive questions.

The last dimension is power distance, which is defined as the extent to which people differ on their status, power or authority and how they must behave [3, 7]. In Indonesian culture, the caste system is one indicator of power distance that has

been known for a thousand years due to the effect of Hinduism [8]. Nowadays, the influence of globalisation has diminished the existing of the caste system and social stratum. Nevertheless, the stratum has not completely disappeared but has transformed into moral customs taught integrally in schools, such as rules of conduct towards the elderly, senior, or more powerful people. Such distances in society are also interfered by religiosity, which places clear boundaries on how people behave towards others, such as the concept of a “guru” or spiritual master which concurrently affects the individual’s attitude towards counselling services [9]. On the one hand, the existing concept of a “guru” encourages people to seek counselling because a counsellor is regarded as a guru to help people with psychological problems. On the other hand, it also makes people tend to have the less positive attitude to seeking professional counselling, due to their belief that a spiritual guru is higher status than to a counsellor [10].

Generally, Indonesian culture has influenced the way people perceive counselling, which shows the tendency towards avoidance, for instance, students tend to avoid counselling even if they needed it. Some of them usually conveyed that counselling was just for people in heavy psychological distress. This shows that there is the possibility of a chain effect of existing traditions and religions in social environments that form a culture which transmits a certain belief to the society. This belief mainly associates with social and supernatural etiologies as reasons behind psychological distress, which is more common in Asian countries than in Western societies [11]. As a result, in Indonesia, people tend to cope with distress by using social supports or religious approaches rather than seeking counselling help [10, 12]. The situation presents a challenge to me as an international student in a Western country because, eventually, I will work in my home country which has a different culture from the country in which I am currently studying. This raises two important questions which will be addressed throughout this paper. What are the challenges of applying non-directive attitude in counselling in Indonesia and is it possible to become a person-centred experiential (PCE) counsellor in Indonesian culture?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The concept of non-directivity

In 1942, Rogers published his second book, titled *Counselling and Psychotherapy – Newer Concepts in Practice*, which emphasised the idea of non-directive therapy as a new approach in counselling [13–15]. He described that non-directive counselling

is different from other approaches as it focuses on following the client's direction and reflecting the client's feelings rather than the expertise of the counsellor. After a decade, non-directive therapy became known as client-centred therapy, which emphasis on the therapist's attitudes in reflecting the client's feelings [16]. Then, from the 1960s to the present day, the term "person-centred approach", which concentrated on the counsellor's attitudes, values, and relationship qualities, emerged as the latest substitute for the previous terms. Therefore, the concept of non-directive counselling seemed to disappear due to the change of terminology.

Even though the concept of non-directivity has fallen out of use, some therapists such as Bozarth [17], Brodley [18], Levitt [19] and Glahn [20] believe that non-directivity is still a part of the basic foundation of Roger's counselling. Bozarth [17] asserts that Rogers did not change the principle of non-directivity in his theory of therapy. The changing term is just to emphasise the intention of the therapy, which is to release the client's self-directive power and not to direct the client. By standing on non-directive principles, a counsellor can provide the core conditions of PCE therapy namely congruence, unconditional positive regard, and emphatic understanding that will facilitate the client's growth [20]. Fundamentally, there is no change in the way this therapy is conducted. Ultimately, the idea of non-directivity implicitly exists in the person-centred counselling as an inherent principle, but there are still some persistent debates regarding the non-directivity concept.

2.2. Debate on concept of non-directivity

Cain [21] presumes that one of the reasons why Rogers preferred to change the non-directive term is maybe because non-directivity is possible to be misinterpreted. For instance, Kahn [22] fails to understand the concept of non-directive attitudes in person-centred counselling (PCC). His first misunderstanding is that consistent non-directivity is impossible to maintain due to the subjective bias of the therapist. Holding on the psychoanalytical background, he asserts that each therapist has an unavoidable subjective bias which inevitably influences the therapy. The impossibility of non-directivity then becomes reasonable, as Sanders [13] also states that everything happening in the counselling will definitely impact the client's attitudes. However, Khan's view does not represent PCC where Merry and Brodley [23] argue that a person-centred counsellor perceives as non-directive because the counsellor attempts to understand the client from his internal frame of reference by giving emphatic responses to prove if her understandings are accurate according to the client.

Secondly, Khan [22] claims that non-directivity leads to make 'one-person psychology'. He assumes that there is only one person in the therapy that is the client because the counsellor is not permitted to give any influence and becomes just a reflector. This view is criticised by Bozarth [17], who states that Kahn ignored the congruence condition in PCC, which shows the counsellor's freedom in bringing the relevant subjective feelings in the counselling. By doing that way, it does not mean that the counsellor becomes more directive because she consistently continues working on the principle of non-directivity by confirming the accuracy of her own feelings towards the client's frame of reference. Moreover, Rogers [24] clearly states that PCC is based on relationship therapy, which is definitely not a one-way relationship.

One last controversial idea of Khan's [22] relates to the restriction on the range of therapy responses. Khan is convinced that holding to pure non-directivity means that a counsellor will minimise the opportunities to help clients solve their own problems. He perceives that non-directivity of PCC is still using a problem-based, whereas it should be seen as a relational-based therapy. But Rogers [25] conveys that generally, a person-centred approach is based on the client's actualising tendency, which facilitates a client to grow during the process of therapy by communicating the counsellor's emphatic understanding and reflecting the client's feelings. Eventually, PCC allows the counsellor to respond to the client as long as it is in line with the client's frame of reference. Therefore, Khan's critique becomes irrelevant to PCC. Bozarth [17] and, Merry and Brodley [23] conclude that Khan's criticism of the theory and principle of PCC only shows his misunderstanding of PCC.

Eventually, Bozarth [17] asserts that non-directivity is a unit of client-centred theory, practice, and behaviour that results from adhering to the core conditions. He enhances that non-directivity is a natural pragmatic stance arising from the theory. Meanwhile, Merry and Brodley [23] also add that non-directivity is an attitude of respect for an individual's capacity to grow in the sufficient socio-environmental conditions that provides freedom through emphatic understanding, acceptance, and congruence. Bozarth's and Merry and Brodley's point of view have given a logic explanation of non-directivity as by standing in the intention of facilitating the client to move into his direction, a counsellor actually steps in the non-directive attitudes without limiting the range of responses because everything the counsellor has done in the counselling process has been based on the client's frame of reference. Their point of view is different from Kahn's opinion as it has shown the meaning beyond non-directivity. It can be concluded that non-directivity is an inherent spirit of PCC which is grounded in the idea of following the client's direction rather than setting the goal or directing the client according to the

counsellor's willingness. Therefore, to be more convinced about non-directivity, there are actually two concepts namely, principled non-directivity and instrumental non-directivity that will be discussed in the next section [26].

3. Discussion

3.1. Understanding principled and instrumental non-directivity

Basically, some therapists [17–20] seem to agree to a certain extent with the idea that non-directivity can be defined as an attitude in therapy. However, they differ in explaining whether non-directivity is an expression of respect for the persons or a process of facilitating the client's growth. This is still being debated, and there is no final decision on which meaning best represents non-directivity. Grant proposed two different conceptions of non-directivity that he called "principled and instrumental non-directiveness" [26]. His conceptions seem to approach a dual meaning to non-directivity. He starts from Brodley's [26] view about the distinction between "client-centred" and "person-centred" and then distinguishes that principled non-directiveness is crucial to the client-centred therapy, whereas instrumental non-directiveness is a unit of person-centred therapy.

Grant [26] describes principled non-directiveness as an attitude to express respect towards a client without any intention of making anything in particular happen. It implies that being non-directive is not a way of causing growth or freedom, but is purely an openness to let whatever happen in the therapy based on the client's direction. Grant illustrates that there will be a moment when a client may request direction, advice, and instructions and the counsellor may indeed offer these. This would seem to be an extremely directive attitude to do. However, from the principled non-directiveness point of view, it is not considered to be directive if the counsellor's decision to do it does not depend on a determination of the client's needs or diagnosis but purely from an attitude to respect the client.

Conversely, it would be considered directive if the counsellor refused to or avoided responding to the client's request as the client is an expert on himself, who knows the best answer to his own issues. By refusing and making that assumption, the counsellor has made a judgement or decision that the best thing for the client to do is to find his own direction. This definitely departs from the principle of non-directivity which wants to let everything happen in the therapy and views the client as the best expert of his own life [17]. Therefore, principled non-directiveness is appropriately described

as being open and responsive to the client's requests without any intention of blocking something from happening. In other words, non-directive attitude does not limit the counsellor to respond to her client in any way [26].

Instrumental non-directiveness, on the other hand, is a significant difference in meaning from principled non-directivity. This concept is derived from Cain's view in his 1989 article about the paradox of non-directiveness. Cain believes that strict adherence to non-directiveness does not harm the client if it is intended for the client's personal development. This implies that, in so far as the intention of the counsellor's attitude or behaviour in the therapy is based on the client's growth reason, it will be considered to be non-directive. Consequently, the counsellor has to have the ability to track the client's growth based on the client's frame of reference to decide when to be non-directive. Eventually, instrumental non-directiveness is a tool of a counsellor to provide her client with significant change.

Generally, principled and instrumental non-directiveness cannot be compared with each other and judged of which one is right or wrong. Even though principled non-directiveness seems to represent non-directivity, this concept is tricky in practice, to a certain extent. For instance, when a counsellor offers advice or direction to a client, the client has the freedom to choose or reject the counsellor's offering. This instance shows an excellent expression of equality between client and counsellor. However, it can be denied that a client might find it difficult to reject such offerings from the counsellor, who is perceived to be an expert of some kind [27]. In this case, one must ask, who is the expert? Nevertheless, in principled non-directiveness, that is not the focus. The absence of any intention to control the counselling process by showing an attitude of pure respect for the client is the most important principle.

Meanwhile, instrumental non-directiveness which seems more pragmatic tends to be easier to be observed in practice. Given the same scenario as above, a counsellor will find it easy to determine which instructions or advice are needed and why they are given. Instrumental non-directivity gives a clear boundary in how to respond to the client. As long as the advice is relevant, reasonable, and effective in facilitating the client's growth and comes from the client's frame of reference, there is no reason to reject it. Ultimately, instrumental non-directiveness is a step towards principled non-directiveness. At first, a counsellor may focus on the facilitative intention, but over time the counsellor will evolve into principled non-directiveness along with the integration of non-directive attitude in counsellor's self-concept. In fact, understanding non-directivity as a principle is beneficial for a counsellor working with anyone from any background or culture. Moreover, the purity and flexibility of principled non-directiveness can answer

my concerns in working with clients from a more directive environment or culture, who may demand direction or instruction, such as those in Indonesia.

3.2. The challenges of applying non-directive attitude in the Indonesian culture

The notion that PCE counselling is distinct from the other counselling approaches is true. It can be seen obviously from how distinctive this approach perceives the ideas of human nature and the ontological standpoint. According to Rogers's theory, person-centred counselling believes that a human being can be trusted to grow towards a positive and constructive direction if he lives in supportive social and environmental climates [28]. This theory implies that the ontological standpoint of a person-centred counsellor is facilitating the client's direction by being grounded within the non-directive attitude. Even though the non-directive terms fell out of use after the terms of "client-centred" and "person-centred" were adopted, this concept remains important as a guideline for a counsellor to behave during therapy [14].

Although it is important to grasp the meaning of non-directivity, it is an extremely difficult concept to be understood. For instance, the novices in person-centred counselling usually perceive that in non-directive counselling, the client would do most of the talking in therapy [29]. By that, it can directly interpret as a passiveness of a counsellor and an activeness of a client during the session. However, this understanding was irrelevant because being passive in therapy discouraged the counsellor of any opportunity to facilitate the client with the six necessary and sufficient conditions in counselling. As a result, the therapy would be less effective due to the absence of the six conditions. Thus, the need of some clarity on the concept of non-directivity is urgent to be obtained to avoid a recurrence of misinterpretation and to deal with the challenges of applying the non-directive attitude in the Indonesian culture.

There are two major challenges for a PCE counsellor to hold on non-directive attitude in Indonesia where the culture tends to pull in the opposite direction. Firstly, Indonesian people usually expect that a counsellor is an expert in therapy. They believe that a counsellor is a 'guru' who can answer any problems and give wise advice to her clients. As a result, when people visit a counsellor, they will ask directive questions and expect the counsellor to provide them with the best solution. Conversely, a non-directive counsellor tends to believe in the idea of going with the client's direction [30]. In other words, it implies that the expert in the counselling is the client and a counsellor is really a facilitator to help the client to move in their own directions. Ultimately, this

contradictive notion of “expert” in counselling certainly discourages the implementation of non-directive attitudes in Indonesian culture.

Secondly, the strong belief of Indonesians in moral and social norms, which strictly regulate what is right or wrong in society, is also firmly a challenge. There is no choice for those who break the norms unless they re-obey the existing rules in order to be accepted by society. The society has a distinctive standard of a good person who goes along with the social agreements. On the other hand, PCE counselling has a distinctive concept of a good person which is called the idea of “fully functioning” [24]. According to Bohart [31] when people are functioning fully, they are fluid and flexible enough to direct their own lives. It does not mean that people isolate themselves from society to be fully functioning, but they can have a dialogue with themselves and their surroundings to deal with certain issues. Therefore, PCE counselling applies non-directive attitudes in therapy which may not be in line with Indonesian culture, due to these different views. Nevertheless, there may be something that can be done to address this situation.

There is no other possible way to deal with the cultural challenges of applying non-directive attitudes in Indonesia except by completely understanding the concept of non-directivity. Mearns and Thorne [9] held that there is no limitation for person-centred counselling to be used in every single culture because the counsellor’s task is to offer a therapeutic relationship and the six core conditions, but not to preclude cross-cultural communication and relationship. Accordingly, applying non-directive attitudes as the part of PCE counselling in the Indonesian culture is possible, regardless of the cultural challenges. The real challenge in this situation is the readiness of the counsellors whether they completely understand the concept of non-directivity both in theory and practice.

3.3. Is it possible to be a non-directive counsellor in the Indonesian culture?

This paper aims to investigate the possibility of being a non-directive counsellor in the Indonesian culture. There is no reason for person-centred counselling to be unworkable in Indonesia. Although there are some challenges from such a culture, which tends to be the opposite of PCC, principally there are no exclusions, limitations and boundaries from this approach. Many articles have shown the feasibility of using person-centred counselling as a non-directive approach with various clients such as Warner [32] with a schizophrenic client, Moon [33] with children, Al-Thani and Moore [34] with Muslims in the Middle East, and Sommerbeck [35] with clients in a directive setting.

Al-Thani and Moore [34] in their article “*Non-directive Counselling in Islamic Culture in the Middle East Explored the Work of one Muslim Person-centred Counsellor in the State of Qatar*”, showed how flexible the use of person-centred counselling is. Their article has broken the stereotype that non-directive counselling is only suitable for Western culture. Al-Thani, as a subject of that study, demonstrates that person-centred counselling is suitable for the clients in Islamic culture. From their article, it can be seen that Al-Thani did not try to figure out how a client could get into a non-directive situation, nor did she find the way to change the cultural mindset of the client or the existing culture. She has made the non-directive attitude a part of her way of life. Thus, when she practised using this approach, there was no reason not to be non-directive.

Moreover, Sommerbeck [35] presents a very similar picture of how non-directive attitudes can become a way of life. He recounts his experiences when working in a highly directive environment. He points out that it is not impossible to remain a non-directive counsellor with his clients and in their environment. Again, it is clearly that the non-directive attitude can become integral to the therapist’s self. Ultimately, there is no other way to be a non-directive counsellor in Indonesian culture than by internalising non-directive attitudes as a part of ourselves. When a non-directive ideology has been integrated into ourselves, one automatically and spontaneously attunes oneself to non-directive attitudes. To achieve that stage, there are two important understandings required. Those are (a) seeing non-directivity as a unity of person-centred counselling, and (b) realising that being a non-directive counsellor is a never-ending process.

Firstly, a holistic understanding of non-directivity as a unity of person-centred counselling is essential to prevent misunderstanding. What happened to Khan [22] was that he tried to explain the non-directivity by separating the concept from the person-centred counselling theory. As a result, he elaborated the concept of non-directivity as something full of criticism. What he disclosed was perfectly plausible, but unfortunately, he failed to view non-directivity as an integral of person-centred theory. As a unity, non-directivity cannot be separated from essential elements of PCC, such as actualizing tendency, self-concept, conditions of worth, the frame of reference, congruence, unconditional positive regard, and emphatic understanding. Non-directive attitudes which are developed from the idea of respecting the client’s actualizing tendency and accepting the client as a person or “as he is” implies that there is an acceptance of the client’s self-concept and condition of worth [17]. Then, in the practice, when a counsellor is non-directive, she genuinely stays in her client’s frame of reference and then conveys emphatic understanding by experiencing unconditional positive regard. In

a spontaneous level of non-directivity, the counsellor will display non-directive attitudes towards her client without any intention except because she purely respects her client.

Secondly, being a non-directive counsellor means continuous processing to be so. Therefore, being non-directive is not like solving a math problem, where, when we know the clues and the right formula, we can get the answer instantly. In fact, even though we may know all the “clues” to being a non-directive counsellor, such as knowing the challenges inherent in cultural differences, understanding the theory of non-directivity, and having the desire to practice it, we have not yet gained complete confidence if we consider our self a non-directive counsellor in a single session. To make the non-directive quality become a part of our self will take some time and experience. Buchanan and Hughes [36] assure us that becoming a person-centred counsellor is more about a continuous process of being which takes time and requires a lot of experiences in practices with the clients.

In general, the impression of Rogers’s [38] original conception of non-directivity is that the concept is mainly about purity and clarity of intention to facilitate the client’s growth. Non-directivity is a real thing that is difficult to be measured. Rogers never focuses on the outcome of the therapy, but he gives more attention to the process of therapy [39]. Therefore, the most important thing is not the result, but whether you have been able to be non-directive or not. However, the most appropriate question is whether you will continue to strive to be non-directive or not. It can be concluded that being a non-directive counsellor in the Indonesian culture is possible if a counsellor can continuously proceed to be non-directive.

4. Conclusion

The exploration of the challenges of being non-directive in Indonesia shows that cultural influences are not the biggest obstacle. Precisely, the most important thing is having a comprehensive understanding of the concept of non-directivity. The ambiguous discussion about non-directivity shows that the concept has been under debate since a long time ago and there is no exact answer to the confusing meaning as Rogers did not provide a clear definition of it. Nevertheless, the concepts of principled and instrumental non-directiveness give some light on the dual meaning of non-directivity. Understanding non-directivity as a principle is more helpful in addressing the concern about working with clients from a directive culture. It can be concluded that there are no exclusions, limitations or boundaries from the person-centred approach that can convince of the impossibility of becoming a non-directive counsellor in the Indonesian

culture. The presence of inevitable challenges arising from the culture of Indonesia will not significantly affect the counsellor, if the non-directive attitudes have become part of the counsellor's self-concept. However, it will take some time to reach that stage.

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